

mortality while nonwhites experienced the greater percentage decline in postneonatal death. As a result, the racial gap has narrowed only in the case of postneonatal death where the nonwhite/white death rate ratio has declined about eight percent.

Over the past decade, both whites and nonwhites generally experienced substantial declines in mortality in all birthweight categories. One exception is observed—the postneonatal death rate of white infants weighing 1500-2499 grams increased 26 percent and now exceeds the rate for nonwhites. A possible factor may be, as later shown, a dramatic rise in births to *unmarried* white women. These women appear vulnerable to postneonatal loss.

Further examining Table 1, lower nonwhite than white death rates are observed in the case of fetal mortality under 1500 grams and neonatal and postneonatal mortality at 1500-2499 grams. A possible explanation is that, compared to whites, low-weight nonwhite

infants tend to be of higher gestational age with greater survival potential.

Among normal-birthweight infants (2500+ grams), declines in white and nonwhite mortality have been about equal. The nonwhite postneonatal death rate remains especially high among these higher-weight infants.

As these changes have occurred, it is noteworthy that the percentage of newborns weighing under 2500 grams changed very little between 1977-81 and 1988-91. It remained unchanged at 6.1 for whites while rising from 11.9 to 12.4 for nonwhites.

Except for postneonatal mortality among higher-weight infants, the birthweight-specific death rates of white and nonwhite infants are not very different (Table 1). Thus, it is the continued two-fold increased rate of low-weight births that contributes to much of the overall higher rate of infant death among nonwhites.

**TABLE 1**  
**Fetal, Neonatal, and Postneonatal Death Rates with Percent Changes**  
**by Race and Birthweight**  
**North Carolina 1977-81 and 1988-91**

<b>Birthweight (Grams)</b>	<b>Death Rate</b>	<b>Whites</b>			<b>Nonwhites</b>		
		<b>1977-81*</b>	<b>1988-91</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>	<b>1977-81*</b>	<b>1988-91</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
TOTAL	Fetal	8.6	6.6	-23.3	15.6	13.0	-16.7
	Neonatal	8.1	5.5	-32.1	14.7	11.8	-19.7
	Postneonatal	3.3	2.8	-15.2	6.5	5.1	-21.5
Under 1500	Fetal	284.1	244.5	-13.9	266.8	219.8	-17.6
	Neonatal	455.8	306.4	-32.8	422.7	318.9	-24.6
	Postneonatal	56.8	38.2	-32.7	74.9	47.5	-36.6
1500-2499	Fetal	30.3	19.4	-36.0	30.8	20.8	-32.5
	Neonatal	27.7	14.1	-49.1	18.2	10.4	-42.9
	Postneonatal	9.2	11.6	+26.1	12.7	9.8	-22.8
2500+	Fetal	3.1	1.8	-41.9	3.7	2.3	-37.8
	Neonatal	2.3	1.4	-39.1	2.6	1.6	-38.5
	Postneonatal	2.6	2.1	-19.2	4.7	3.7	-21.3

\*Postneonatal deaths cover only the four years 1978-81.